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C O N F I D E N T I A L HARARE 000716

SIPDIS

NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR J. FRAZER, D. TEITELBAUM
LONDON FOR C. GURNEY
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DS/OP/AF

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [ASEC](#) [ZI](#) [MDC](#)
SUBJECT: CONTROVERSIAL MDC MP JOB SIKHALA ARRESTED AFTER
INTRA-MDC CLASHES

REF: HARARE 693

Classified By: Political Officer Audu Besmer for reasons 1.5 b/d

¶11. (U) On April 25, police arrested Job Sikhala, MDC MP for St. Mary's (a high-density suburb of Harare) and five of his supporters. Three were released without charge on April 27, but Sikhala and two others were still in custody on April 28.

Sikhala was arrested at his house in St. Mary's after his supporters attacked MDC supporters loyal to Tendekayi Mswata, MDC Provincial Youth Chair for Chitungwiza (a large high-density area encompassing St. Mary's), at a funeral in Zengeza (near St. Mary's). In the skirmish MDC youths loyal to Mswata, Enoch Tawonezvi and Chirimudondo Mabviegudo, were both stabbed, not fatally, and shots were fired. Mswata loyalists had attacked Sikhala loyalists with knives and batons at Sikhala's home on April 23. During that incident Sikhala supporter Marata was stabbed and was still in the hospital on April 28. Mswata said he intends to seek the MDC's nomination to contest the St. Mary's parliamentary seat in the March 2005 elections and is reportedly supported by the MDC National Chairman and other high-level MDC officials.

¶12. (C) A controversial figure by any standards, Sikhala has been in the news recently for publicly attacking MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai over MDC elections strategy. He is widely despised within the leadership structures of the MDC for his confrontational, maverick, agitator style and for publicly refusing to support party initiatives with which he does not agree. An MDC official said recently, however, that he is popular among the people for his confrontational public statements. There are rumors circulating that he plans to form his own political party and run for the St. Mary's seat on a separate ticket, should he lose the MDC's nomination to Mswata. (Comment: The MDC selects candidates via a nominating process within its party structures. Mswata has a good chance of obtaining the party's nomination. End Comment.)

¶13. (C) COMMENT: That prospective MDC MP candidates have pitted MDC supporters against one another speaks to a host of problems facing an opposition under stress: growing internecine rifts, unraveling discipline, and the dearth of qualified people in the mid-level leadership. Sikhala has been arrested at least fifteen times in the past two years and was tortured by GOZ authorities in January 2003. That he was arrested and detained again now is another signal from the GOZ that being an MDC MP is hazardous business (Ref), whether struggling against the ruling party or within the opposition.

SULLIVAN